

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Ball State vs Ole Miss

Thursday, March 20, 2025

Waco, Texas, USA

Foster Pavilion

Ball State Cardinals

Brady Sallee

Ally Becki

Marie Kiefer

Media Conference



especially previous years for me, we played UConn and played all these big schools. That's also helped a lot, and we've just got to play our basketball. We know how to play and what we need to do. So just not be intimidated, just go at it like it's one of our last games, and that's been our mentality these past couple games.

Q. I know you guys left yesterday with a big crowd walking out of the stadium. What's it like for you to see the community grow over your four years here at Ball State?

MARIE KIEFER: We've had the support, and we have appreciated the support. We could never go where we are now without the Cardinal Nation, so it just felt great that they supported us through this all.

ALLY BECKI: Yeah, it's fun to see everyone come out and support us and just that big send-off. I was sitting close to kind of the code red and the cheerleaders and the band and everything, and I heard them talking about how awesome it is being on this trip. It's just cool to kind of take them with us. One of them was saying they haven't flown since their high school year sophomore, so it's cool for us to give them that experience, too.

It's not just us in this tournament. Like, it's the whole Ball State Nation. It's cool to kind of sit back and see the perspective of what kind of we've brought to everyone else, and so yeah, just kind of grateful for this opportunity and to give it to other people, too.

Q. Ally, what's been the key? What is this team made of? What makes you guys go?

ALLY BECKI: There's a bunch of grit on this team. We brought in a bunch of transfers and a couple freshmen that came in and just made a huge impact like right when they stepped on the court.

We all knew what the end goal was, and we're here to win, and we brought in a bunch of people that want to win and people that did stay here. We've won all three seasons we've been here, just we haven't made it to the end goal that we've tried to do. But yeah, just a lot of grit, a lot of

Q. You guys have been talking about this all week. What's it like to finally be here in?

ALLY BECKI: It's amazing, honestly. It's obviously our first time being in March Madness and in the tournament. Just trying to soak everything in and just stay in the moment. Our president, he came to us a couple weeks ago, and he was just like, the one thing that I kind of wanted to tell you guys is just, like, stay in the moment with each other, and that's kind of what I've been trying to do.

This is our last time, so I only get this once, so I'm just trying to be grateful for all this and just be in the moment.

Q. Marie, can you talk about the run that y'all had in conference? All the pressure is on you in the tournament to win because, otherwise, you probably don't get in.

MARIE KIEFER: It was a great season. We knew that we were going to come out strong from our preseason. We had a really great opponent that we were able to go against.

So we just worked really hard in season and built our way to the tournament, which there was a lot of pressure, but we ended up getting it done.

Q. Ally, Ole Miss, an SEC team, they beat a bunch of big-name teams. What do you tell yourself not to get intimidated? How do you get over the name of the school you're facing?

ALLY BECKI: Right. We've played teams like this,



toughness, and Brady did a great job of recruiting all these players and just having faith in us.

Q. I just want to ask you guys, a lot of you did stay and you made a decision to trust this process with Coach Brady. Why was that, and what has that meant to you these last four years?

MARIE KIEFER: Specifically our teammates and knowing that if we stayed, we can build what we want to get to, and we've put in the work, so we have gotten what we wanted to get to. So, our teammates and our coaches and just knowing that we all had the same end goal.

ALLY BECKI: I would just say that, too, and trusting the process. Brady has kind of instilled in us since day one -- especially bringing in me, Maddy and Marie, and then Alex came in later. He knew we had a special group and he wanted to keep us. It's easy now to transfer, a bunch of NIL money, keep going bigger, all this and that. I think we really wanted to win, and we knew what we were capable of.

Yeah, just the teammates really just kept us together, and yeah, it's just easy playing for him and just playing with each other, too. It's fun, and I enjoy basketball.

It's easy for people to get down on themselves, confidence level, not doing this and that, but it's honestly been enjoyable, and then, obviously, winning is fun.

Q. Obviously, this stage is big. How do you coach the girls where you're not letting the stage get the best of them?

BRADY SALLEE: You know, probably having the veterans that we have, six seniors and MJ has been here, done it. We've got a veteran experienced group. We know the job.

I think part of it, too, is our non-conference schedule, the way we prepared ourselves. You go play in the battle for Atlantis, and it's easy to get caught up in where you are and where you're playing and all this stuff, but when the ball goes up, you've got a job to do.

It's kind of the way we roll. We've got a saying in our program, 1-0 today, and it'll be no different when we play Ole Miss.

Q. Nikki said that y'all have a relationship that goes back a way. I wonder where that started, and how close are you guys?

BRADY SALLEE: Yeah. It started in Menomonee, Wisconsin. Everybody look up that place. You know, it

was back when Nikki was playing at Marquette, and she had come through the Viking Club, which was the premier Wisconsin AAU group back in the day. Shout-out to Keith Knoll and all his boys. It was one of the tournaments. It was the place to be in July.

She was there helping run the tournament.

Really, it was back in the day of recruiting where you could go do your job and then afterwards, because the rules weren't what they were now, you could go get to know people and connect and network and all those kind of things. Nikki was one of those that was working and trying to meet everybody she could. And so, we first met there, and of course have remained friends through all of her stops, all of my stops, and her husband Tom, I've known forever.

It's kind of a little bit of a coming-home moment. When we made it, she mentioned the Menomonee tie and the good times we used to have up there. What a great job she's done and what an absolute star you guys have here. Just love her to death.

Q. Earlier Ally and Marie were talking about how they've basically, through these four years, really grown as this whole group of seniors. How have you grown almost with those seniors throughout this season and the seasons before?

BRADY SALLEE: Yeah, it's a great question. You may look at my hairline and say, okay, what's he got to learn or what's he got to change or what's he got to learn? I think as any coach, the minute you stop learning and stop wanting to learn, it's time to get out.

I think with these four in particular, these four years with this group in particular, I've learned how to kind of trust them and just get out of the way at times. When you have talent like we have, there's a tendency as a coach to want to coach every dribble, every pass, every movement, all those kind of things. Sometimes when you got talent, you just get out of the way and you let it play out.

It's an approach that we've taken this year. You've got so much experience on the floor, the last thing they want is a new close-out drill or a new rebounding drill. They look at me like, Coach, we got it. And they do.

I've learned a lot about how to just trust and step back a little bit and know that at the end of the day, your talent is going to get you where you want to go.

Q. Obviously, the last time Ball State was in the tournament, assistant head coach Audrey McDonald



was playing. And they were a 5 versus a 12. How has her advice -- since she was a player that upset the 5, how has her advice rubbed off on the players?

BRADY SALLEE: No. I think they've had those conversations. It's just more of a comforting kind of talk, like been here, done it, this is right in our wheelhouse, this is how we did it. It's just that reassurance.

But yeah, her experience as a player and going through this, and really the message of guys, it's worth it. As we were trudging through February trying to get to here, it's that calming message but that motivation of, it's worth it, just keep fighting, just keep fighting. It's worth it. Don't give into the pressures. Don't give into the adversities. It's worth it. Clearly, they knew it, but she has a different perspective on it.

For her to be involved in both of our times in the tournament, I couldn't think of a better person, first of all, but it's reassuring to have her sitting in the seat to my right, I'll tell you that.

Q. Looking back during this season, one of the main quotes that was always on social media, always everywhere, it's Muncie watches women's sports. How have you seen your team kind of impact that Muncie community, even coming up to this tournament here?

BRADY SALLEE: You know, I think across the country, women's basketball clearly has taken a massive step forward with the Caitlin Clark era. The thing that I'm proud of and with our administration and our community is, we were ready to take advantage of it and take our place in it.

We just happened to have the right team. We happened to have the right individuals that our community could fall in love with. We're talking about young ladies that will, like, go to a middle school game to support a kid that's been at our camps and will go to a high school game because those kids come to our games, and they take note of that. They pay attention to that, and they want to give back in those situations. Hey, she came to watch us, let's go support them.

I would get a text from somebody in the community with a picture of our kids sitting at Delta High School watching a kid play, and I'm like, holy cow, I had no idea that they were thinking that way or doing it, but that's who I coach.

When you've got that two-way street right in your program where our kids want to give back, they want to be part of the community, they want to show their appreciation for the crowds we've built at Ball State, I think it's easy for the Muncie community to fall in love with our group.

What's cool right now is, it's expanded way beyond the Muncie community and Delaware County. It's now the state of Indiana. The people that I'm hearing from and -- the media has been tremendous in our state, different radio shows and the feedback of people talking about, man, it was great to hear about Ball State down here and those kind of things.

So it's just really the perfect storm that we were ready for, and again, I think you talk about our marketing department, our ticketing department, our admin top to bottom, I mean, we've got the best social media stud in the country, and I would argue with anybody over that.

You know, I've heard so many people talk about they feel like they know our team because of the work Caroline does for us. She is an absolute star.

We're going to hold on to her as long as we can and get ready to try to hire her when she graduates back there.

It's all of that, right. I said this after we won our championship -- I guess we won two, but after we won the tournament championship, I said, you know, this isn't our championship. We really felt like it was everybody's that was a part of it, from our campus community to Muncie, all the people that come in and support us. It just really is bigger than our locker room right now.

I think our kids understand that. They appreciate that. They're playing with that pride behind the Ball State brand right now.

Q. Coach, I wonder what you see in that matchup with Ole Miss, what you've seen from them on film.

BRADY SALLEE: Is that who we play? Thanks for that. Thanks.

You know, I see a team that plays hard. They're going to get up and try to make every bounce, every pass, everything you do extremely hard. They play from defense to offense, and then they go rebound the heck out of the ball.

I think those two things, we're going to have to be able to handle and understand that it's not always going to be a work of art when you're playing against a system like that. You're going to have to muck it up a little bit and be okay being ugly.

We feel like our non-conference schedule, we played North Carolina, we played Ohio State, we played Texas A&M, along with the who's who of mids, South Dakota State, and

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

that part of it, we feel like our conference has us ready to go play the type of game we need to play.

We understand Ole Miss, in places, is going to be different, and we're going to have to adjust to it. We're going to have to see it in real time and be able to adjust.

It's no different than any game. There's going to be adversity, and the team that can handle it and embrace it, adjust from it, is going to be the team that gets to play on Sunday.

Q. As someone who hasn't watched a lot of Ball State, how would you describe your team, and what are some things that maybe matchup well with Ole Miss like you were just talking about?

BRADY SALLEE: Yeah, so the way I would describe our team is, we believe in sharing the ball. We judge ourselves on assist numbers. We believe in not being a one-trick pony in terms of we've got to get the ball to a certain player. So we do share the wealth.

We talk way more about getting the right shot instead of who's shooting it, so the execution side of it.

But I think the difference this year with our group is, we're playing from defense to offense. That was something we identified last year that we had to do to win this thing.

So we do have a lot of belief in how we defend, and it's a very game-by-game specific scout that we change up some different things that we do.

In terms of what are some things we do that can hurt Ole Miss, I don't know that I've got a big long list of it. I think we believe, first of all. And I think we understand we're battle tested with who we've played. We played one of the top 50 non-conference schedules in the country, so we've been there, we've done it, but respect the heck out of them and know that they're good. So I don't want to seem flippant with, oh, yeah, blah, blah, and all that. I get it.

But we're here to win. And we believe we can.

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